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ABSTRACT

A survey of California community colleges was conducted in order to ascertain what methods were being used to identify students for placement in freshman English courses, and what types of programs and services were being offered for entering students with reading and writing deficiencies. Of 100 colleges surveyed, 64 responded. There seems to be agreement among the respondents that single multipurpose identification instrument is not yet available which will assist in English placement and which will also identify individual student learning deficiencies. Currently, 48 colleges use a standardized test, 24 also require the submission of an essay as a writing sample, 7 use a writing sample alone, and 9 colleges allow open enrollment in freshman English courses. The writing sample is recommended as the most reliable placement method, but the time and expense required have caused several colleges to discontinue it. Tutoring services for students deficient in basic learning skills are available at 58 colleges. Separate remedial reading and writing courses are offered at 51 colleges, 46 colleges have a basic skills laboratory, and 15 colleges offer two-hour reading and communications skills courses. Survey responses are tallied, and respondent comments are attached. (Author/BB)

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ENGLISH PLACEMENT SURVEY

The English Department at Cosumnes River College has, for several semesters, been experimenting with different methods of identifying students who plan to enter Freshman English (English 1A) courses. The department decided that before they made a decision regarding course placement they would like to find out how other community colleges throughout the state were solving this problem. They were also interested in surveying other colleges regarding the types of programs and services which are being offered for the students who enter community colleges with reading and writing disabilities.

The Research Office was asked to develop a questionnaire to be sent to the community colleges in California. Of the 100 colleges in the state, 64 responded to the survey.

Summary:

The data which we received seemed to indicate that there is no method which is widely accepted, regarding the placement of students in Freshman English (English 1A) courses.

There are 48 colleges using a standardized test to identify the students who will be recommended for English 1A courses. Twenty-seven colleges require that the students must also submit an essay or composition (writing sample). In these colleges the evaluation of the writing sample is combined with the standardized test score to determine English 1A placement.

If a writing sample is required it is usually administered during the first week of the semester. At that time students who are identified as lacking basic writing skills are redirected or counseled into basic writing skills courses or are assigned to workshops where tutoring services are available.

The writing sample was recommended as the most reliable placement method. However the time and expense of grading the sample as well as the wide range of subjective judgments involved in the evaluation of the sample, has caused several colleges to forego their requirements.

Colleges who do not use a standardized test vary in their placement procedures. Nine colleges use open enrollment in English 1A courses, based on counseling, student self-direction or the G.P.A. from the students high school transcript. Seven colleges use the writing sample only or a writing sample combined with their own English Dept.-made test.

The majority of the colleges who responded, 58 offer tutoring services for those students who appear to be deficient in basic learning skills. Fifty-one colleges offer separate remedial reading and writing courses for these students. Forty-six colleges reported that they have a basic skills laboratory, some of these colleges offer self-paced individualized instruction. Fifteen colleges offer two-hour reading and communication skills courses. One college reported a separate department for those students who are reading below the 8th grade level.

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There was a feeling expressed by many English Department chairmen that more students are coming to the community college less prepared in basic reading and writing skills than in the past. They felt that a problem exists in identifying these students. There is also a problem in encouraging these students, once they are identified, to participate in the basic learning skills program that the college offers.

These seemed to be agreement by the colleges that a single multi-purpose identification instrument is not yet available which will assist in English course placement and which will also identify individual student learning disabilities.

Several colleges reported that a need exists to offer more specialized programs and services for the student who enters college with learning deficiencies.

Henry R. Walters
Research

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES RESPONDING TO SURVEY 64

PERSONS COMPLETING SURVEY

English department chairmen	18
Division chairmen	16
Dean of Instruction	10
Dean - Student Personnel	7
Counselor	4
Learning Center coordinator	4
Testing coordinator	4
Acting president	1

DO YOU USE THE COOPERATIVE ENGLISH TEST FOR STUDENT PLACEMENT IN ENGLISH COURSES?

Yes 14 No 50

IF YES, COOPERATIVE ENGLISH TEST IS:

14 Required as part of entrance requirements (required of all entering students)

14 Required for student placement in English 1A. Cooperative English Test cut-off score for student placement in English 1A.

154 - 1	159 - 3
156 - 2	160 - 8

IF NO, WE USE ANOTHER TEST FOR ENGLISH 1A PLACEMENT.

34 colleges use other tests.

Most used:

ACT	7
SAT	6
College English Placement Test	4
SCAT	4
College-made test	4

Others:

Davis Reading Test
Survey of Reading Achievement
Stanford Reading Achievement
College Test of Basic Skills
Purdue Placement Test
I.T.E.D.
Gates Reading and Vocabulary
STEP
CAT
Nelson Denny
Comparative Guidance Placement Program

WE DO NOT USE STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES FOR PLACEMENT IN ENGLISH COURSES.

16 colleges do not use standardized test scores for English placement.

Placement method used:

GPA (high school transcript)	2
Student composition only	5
Open enrollment in English courses based on counseling	6
College-made test plus essay	2
Student self evaluation	1

DO YOU REQUIRE A WRITING SAMPLE, IN ADDITION TO STANDARDIZED TEST DATA FOR PLACEMENT IN ENGLISH 1A COURSES?

27 colleges require a writing sample.

37 colleges do not require a writing sample.

HOW DO YOU SERVE STUDENTS WHO ARE ENROLLED IN YOUR COLLEGE WHO APPEAR TO BE DEFICIENT IN BASIC LEARNING SKILLS - READING, WRITING/ORAL COMMUNICATIONS?

15 combined reading/communication skills course (one hour/two hour block of time)

51 separate reading and communication courses

46 offer basic learning skills laboratory

58 offer tutoring services

Other services offered to students:

Writing laboratory.

Separate department for those students reading below 8th grade level.

Programmed learning.

Study skills course.

Learning Skills Development Program.

Short courses in grammar/writing.

HOW ARE STUDENTS PLACED IN THESE COURSES/SERVICES.

35 Placement on test score

30 No test required.

51 Placement on faculty/counselor referrals.

51 Students own choice/selection.

COMMENTS REGARDING WRITING SAMPLE AND ENGLISH COURSE PLACEMENT

Colleges who use writing sample:

"We do during 1st week of class - results in a minor percentage of transferrals."

"This semester we asked all English 1A students to write a diagnostic essay during during the first week of class. They were placed accordingly. Our instructors see pluses and minuses to essay form of testing."

"A writing sample is more valid in determining a student's ability in composition."

"A test score and a writing sample is a necessary double check on placement."

"We read only the essays of those students falling into marginal test score areas, do not read all essays."

"The main difficulty in English 1A seems to be misplacement of students at the lowest end of placement based on test scores only."

"The English instructors score the sample and combine it with the Nelson-Denny."

"After students are enrolled in 1A class on the basis of a diagnostic test they are all asked to write a composition in class the first day and are then placed in another class if the instructor feels that they should not be in 1A. The SCAT results are used as an advisory tool. Students are advised but not required to take appropriate course."

"Students are placed in English 1A courses on basis of high school counselor referral. If students complain about placement they are requested to write 300-500 word essay to be read by English 1A instructor."

"A reading/writing profile of our students permits us to serve students by giving them additional classes in fundamentals of reading and writing."

"The combination of an objective test with a written sample has made more effective placement possible. No placement device is truly effective unless the test runs to 5 hours or more."

"The writing sample pinpoints particular problems and points toward remediation procedures. Students are not screened prior to enrollment. The writing sample and teacher made diagnostic tests are employed early in the quarter. If necessary, students are referred to the Learning Skills Center for remedial help."

"I do not put much faith in objective tests. We give our own test. We ask the student to write a paragraph on a choice of 3 topics, paragraph is read by 3 instructors."

"There is a greater problem in determining exit levels from remedial courses to English 1A."

"Writing sample is valuable but we do not have funds to administer before the opening of classes. We attempt to shift students after they write in class during the first week."

"Writing sample of great value. We are considering dropping the Coop. Eng. and using only an essay."

Colleges who do not use writing sample:

"Valuable but impossible to administer in time for registration."

"Not too valuable at the community college level."

"The problem is to get the papers properly evaluated by more than one instructor and the time involved in the task. We are not satisfied with the current method of placement (Coop English Test) but have not found a better method."

"We have had some experience with writing samples about 8 years ago. We found the variables about as great as with objective testing. Our placement is poor. Our counselors are "anti-testing", feeling that it is a negative experience for students and no more valid than G.P.A."

"Good only if the entire English Department agrees on a criteria for grading the sample. We haven't had much luck."

"All students who wish can enroll in English 1A. Remedial help is available in a workshop. Those unable to complete 1A earn remedial non-transferable credit in the workshop."

"We've gone the whole route!"

"We have assumed that the time involved in evaluating writing sample would be prohibitive."

"If the student places just below the cut-off score, the writing sample might indicate that she/he has been incorrectly placed. All students in our remedial program are given a writing sample test during the first week of class. It seems to be working well. 1A instructors have recently, however, commented that the less prepared 1A student population seems up."

"Writing sample valuable but we haven't been able to afford the expense of evaluating students writing before registration."

"A writing sample is only as reliable as the subjectiveness of scoring allows."

"We are permitting counselors to place students in levels of English based on high school grades."

"We do not employ "tracking" in our program. Instructors of the freshman English classes determine which of their students have deficiencies and then suggest those students enroll in our Language Arts workshop sections for help in reading and writing skills."

"No money - we're revising our entire program."

"We went to open enrollment in 1972. Failures and drop outs have not changed significantly."

"We are searching."

"Our English Department has problems."

"We use criteria for placement which is - a "B" average in all high school English classes, or a "B" in English Essentials, or a satisfactory grade on a standardized English test, or recommendation of the teacher after one or two writing assignments have been evaluated."

"The single best test is an essay; however since the administration won't budget for pre-enrollment of grading essays and since we don't want to spend two weeks in testing and reclassification, we rely on the reading test. This program is a constant source of irritation."

"Program small, experimental. English 1A is run with an accompanying workshop for remediation; student remains with a 1A section until competence is attained. Tutor of workshop in close contact with other (non-English) instructors and assignments of those classes become one object of tutorial sessions."

"Our placement is a mess. We have been forced to do it after the students have already placed themselves in classes, and then we try to replace them. This is due to minority group opposition to pre-registration testing. We are told this attitude is changing."

"Our English placement procedure is very culturally biased and does not measure aspects of English other than reading. Hopefully it will change."

COMMENTS REGARDING BASIC LEARNING SKILLS PROGRAMS.

"We plan to integrate reading, writing, math and tutorial skills into a combined program."

"I think we are finally getting it together. The realization that we are not serving the lower quartile of our students has been around for awhile, but some recently introduced programs are now beginning to serve those students' needs."

"We have very successful reading and writing laboratories which offer self-paced, individualized instruction, with tutoring available."

"We need improvement in the identification of these students." (academically disadvantaged)

"Our basic learning skills program uses comparatively simple audio tutorial techniques to teach the mechanics of usage and a few rhetorical skills in writing."

"We serve almost 500 students per semester in our Reading Skills courses. Our English Essentials class is available for those who wish to qualify for English 1A and are not otherwise qualified. Writing lab supplements English Essentials courses.

"We have no basic learning skills program as such. We offer basic reading and remedial English courses."

"Have a solid program, 3 full-time trained instructors - high drop-out rate."

"A faculty committee is studying the adequacy of our program."

"All English 1A students are required to spend 2 weeks in the Communication Skills Center."

"We have an excellent Learning Center; Reading lab is new and staffed by one of our best instructors."

"Some of our learning skills courses are not developmental but rather enrichment in nature (i.e. term paper writing, library skills, etc.)."

"We use a three level placement. We find we have increased retention, decreased fail grades."

"We try everything!"

"In developing state but we have good commitment on the part of the college president."

"I believe our program in composition is focused heavily on writing. Many students take three semesters of writing in three different courses. In none of these courses do we water down the writing with too much grammar or literature. Grammar and literature are only used to reinforce the writing experience. Our reading program is individualized on three levels also. We use diagnostic and perscriptive approach."

"Through the Learning Center we are attempting to integrate many of the basic learning skills we find students lack. We correlate Speech, English so that both foreign and native students are served."

"There is a lack of qualified instructors in the remedial area."

"The English staff and Learning Skills Center work very closely together."

"We need to expand greatly - especially to help the non-reader and the foreign born student."

"We have two centers, one auto-tutorial, the other a writing center when faculty and tutors are available."

"We now have a piece-meal program but there is a move to establish a comprehensive program designed for people who fall off the bottom. At present it is not very effective. In fact, it has only started to exist as a "program" in the planning stages this fall."

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